Ex-worker alleges crematorium ran in gruesome way

PASADENA (AP) — Crematorium owner David Sconce hired men to beat up two funeral directors, talked about killing his grandfather, pried gold teeth from corpses and boasted of the number of bodies he could burn at once, a former employee alleged.

Sconce, 31, was known as "Hitler" by his employees at Altadena Crematorium, former driver David Edwards testified Friday at a Municipal Court hearing where the defense sought a reduction in Sconce's $500,000 bail.

Testimony was to resume today.

Edwards said he and two others split $750 for attacks on the funeral directors, whom Sconce feared would publish in an industry magazine allegations that he performed multiple cremations.

"He wanted them messed up and hospitalized and that's it. ... We beat them up," said Edwards, who worked for Sconce from 1983 to December 1985. He and two other men have pleaded guilty to assault charges.

But Sconce's parents dismissed the testimony as lies.

"David is a very gentle soul," said his mother, Laurieanne Lamb-Sconce. His father, Jerry, added, "This is just baloney."

Sconce and his parents have pleaded innocent to 41 criminal counts, mostly felonies, involving stealing and selling body parts, performing multiple cremations, mixing human ashes, filing false death certificates and waiting four months to inter a stillborn baby girl.

The charges involve a probe of Lamb Funeral Home in Pasadena and the now-defunct Coastal International Eye and Tissue Bank.

On Friday, Deputy District Attorney Walt Lewis filed five additional charges against Sconce, including assault, robbery and conspiring to hire men to beat up the funeral directors.

In addition, the attorney general's office has filed a civil suit against Sconce's parents, who own Lamb Funeral Home, alleging they embezzled $100,000 in interest from 172 prepaid funeral trust accounts.

They remain free on $5,000 bail each.

In Friday's testimony, Edwards said he once saw Sconce pile seven or eight bodies into cremation ovens. He also said he viewed as many as a dozen bodies in the crematory retorts or containers.

"I looked at it as gore. It was sickening," Edwards said, adding that Sconce sometimes spoke about setting records for stacking bodies.

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